

Plan and Coordinate

Host Congressional and Legislative Events

One of the most effective ways to get to know your members of Congress or legislators is to host an event. This will provide an opportunity for them to visit your program and come away with a better appreciation of the critical need for victims services support.

The following points will provide a framework:

- **Do your research on each member of Congress or legislator.** When you schedule your event – a breakfast, lunch, general open house, or community forum – make sure that you do it on a day when your members of Congress or legislators are in their home district and are able to participate.
- **Host an event that will provide information to members of Congress or legislators.** Invite victims, staff, volunteers, or board members to speak. Use every appropriate opportunity to showcase your program and the services it provides. Show clearly how you help people in the community – not just in terms of providing crisis services, but also through prevention education, children’s programs, etc.
- **Send out a personalized invitation far enough in advance to get your event on their schedule, and call to follow-up.** Don’t be disappointed if your members of Congress or legislators send staff in their place. Show them the same respect and attention you would devote to their boss. If your staff, board members, or volunteers have personal relationships with legislators, ask them to write a personal note or make a call to follow-up on your invitation.
- **Plan your event so as not to waste time.** Provide some time for questions, a tour of your facility (if appropriate), and a presentation. Decide in advance what kind of information you want to convey and try to stick to a schedule. Members of Congress or legislators are usually very busy and appreciate knowing how long you expect them to be there.
- **A word about politics – be careful.** We need everyone’s good will, Democrats and Republicans alike. In many communities, elected officials of different parties know each other and work well together for the benefit of their community. In others, they don’t. In many areas of the state, members of one party or another predominate. If you have a solidly entrenched member of one party who is not likely to be defeated, inviting her/his opponent at the same time is probably not a good idea. Use common sense. You have a good enough feel for your community to know who you should or should not invite. You may also want to arrange for more individualized meetings with some legislators or candidates, who are unable to make your events. Don’t wait until the next time you host an event to invite them. Instead, arrange a time when it’s convenient for them to visit your program.
- **By the same token, feel free to invite candidates from both parties if your events are being held in an election year and you have an open seat in your area.**
- **If you have a newly-elected member, the sooner you make contact after the election, the better.**